

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY PORT LOUIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L VICTORIA 0185

E.O.11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINS, PDIP, SE, BE

SUBJECT: MEETING OF OPPONENTS OF RENE GOVERNMENT

REF: VICTORIA 125 (NOTAL)

1. SUPPORTERS OF DEPOSED SEYCHELLES' PRESIDENT JAMES MANCHAM HELD THEIR FIRST FORMAL MEETING FEB. 19 ON PRASLIN, THE COUNTRY'S SECOND LARGEST ISLAND AND A FORMER STRONGHOLD OF MANCHAM'S SEYCHELLES DEMOCRATIC PARTY (SDP). ACCORDING PARTICIPANTS AND POLICE SOURCES, MEETING (ATTENDED BY ABOUT 450 SDP FOLLOWERS) WAS BRIEF AND ORDERLY. ONLY EXTRAORDINARY SECURITY PRECAUTION TAKEN WAS DISPATCH FROM PRINCIPAL ISLAND OF MAHE OF SEVERAL SPECIAL BRANCH POLICEMEN AND TWO ARMY OFFICERS IN CIVILIAN CLOTHES WHO REMAINED DISCRETELY IN BACKGROUND.

2. ALTHOUGH GATHERING WAS ORGANIZED AND CHAIRED BY FORMER M.P. DAN PAYET (WHO WAS ELECTED SDP PRASLIN BRANCH PRESIDENT),
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MEETING WAS DOMINATED BY OWEN HOAREAU, AN ARTICULATE AND WELL-EDUCATED MAHE-BASED BUSINESSMAN IN HIS MID-30'S. IN HIS SPEECH HOAREAU NOTED THAT PRESIDENT RENE HAD TARGETED HIS POST-COUP CRITICISM AT MANCHAM RATHER THAN THE PARTY, THAT SDP HAD NOT BEEN PROSCRIBED AND CALLED ON SDP SUPPORTERS TO MOUNT "PEACEFUL OPPOSITION TO GOVERNMENT." HOAREAU ALLOWED THAT, WHILE THERE WAS "A LOT OF GOOD" IN WHAT THE RENE GOVERNMENT

WAS ATTEMPTING TO ACCOMPLISH, THERE WERE ALSO BASIC DISAGREEMENTS AND THAT SEYCHELLOIS "SHOULD NOT BE AFRAID TO CRITICIZE IN A CONSTRUCTIVE WAY." HE OBSERVED THAT NO ELECTIONS HAD BEEN HELD SINCE JUNE 1977 COUP D'ETAT AND CLAIMED SDP REMAINED THE MAJORITY PARTY. SINCE SEYCHELLES WAS NOT A ONE PARTY STATE, SDP ADHERENTS SHOULD ORGANIZE THEMSELVES TO CONTEST THE ELECTIONS SCHEDULED FOR 1979.

3. RENE TOLD BRITISH HIGH COMMISSIONER PUGH THAT HIS GOVERNMENT HAD NOT OPPOSED MEETING DESPITE FACT THAT 3 MINOR REGULATIONS GOVERNING PUBLIC ASSEMBLY HAD BEEN BREACHED BY ORGANIZERS. ACCORDING PUGH, RENE INDICATED HE TOOK SDP REVITALIZATION EFFORT "EASILY IN STRIDE." RENE SAID HE WAS TRYING TO CONTINUE TO STRIKE BALANCE BETWEEN COMPETING CLAIMS OF STRONG ADMINISTRATION AND HIS SUBSCRIPTION TO FREE SOCIETY AND REITERATED GOVERNMENT'S STANCE ON FREE EXPRESSION.

4. PRASLIN MEETING WAS ATTENDED BY HONORARY BELGIAN CONSUL RONNI CROONENBERGHS WHO HAS SINCE BEEN ARRESTED, JAILED FOR NEARLY A WEEK AND DEPORTED. POLICE SAID CROONENBERGHS WAS IN ILLEGAL POSSESSION OF FIREARMS AND HAD BEEN "ENGAGING IN ACTIVITIES LIKELY TO ENDANGER THE SECURITY OF THE STATE." (CROONENBERGHS AFFAIR BEING REPORTED SEPTEL).

5. COMMENT: HAVING SUCCEEDED IN STAGING WHAT IS IN EFFECT FIRST POST-COUP ANTI-GOVERNMENT MEETING, IT WILL BE INTERESTING
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TO SEE WHAT PATH SDP WILL FOLLOW AND WHAT STEPS GOVERNMENT MAY TAKE TO CONTAIN A POTENTIALLY DIFFICULT DEVELOPMENT. THOUGH FACT THAT CROWD WAS SMALLER THAN ANTICIPATED AND (ASIDE FROM PAYET) NO SIGNIFICANT SDP PERSONALITIES PARTICIPATED IS COMFORTING TO GOVERNMENT, IF SDP NUCLEUS ORGANIZES OTHER MEETINGS AND IF MOMENTUM PICKS UP, GOVERNMENT MAY FEEL COMPELLED TO RECONSIDER ITS PRESENT TOLERANT ATTITUDE. LINKAGE BETWEEN ARREST OF CROONENBERGHS (WHICH UNLIKE PRASLIN MEETING HAS BEEN ACCORDED EXTENSIVE COVERAGE IN GOVERNMENT MEDIA) AND SDP ACTIVITIES COULD FURNISH GOS WITH EXCUSE FOR BANNING FUTURE SDP MEETINGS.
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